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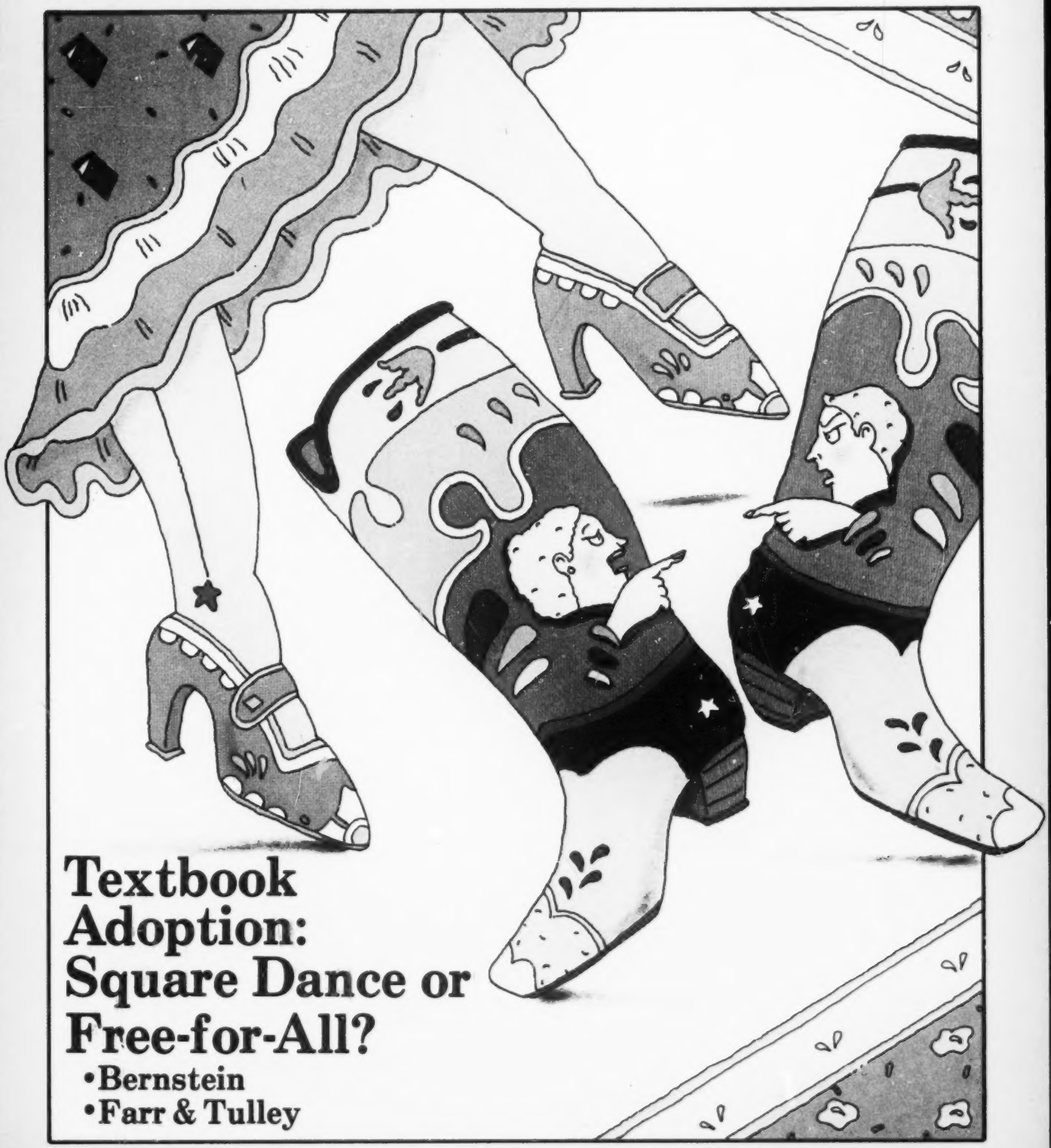
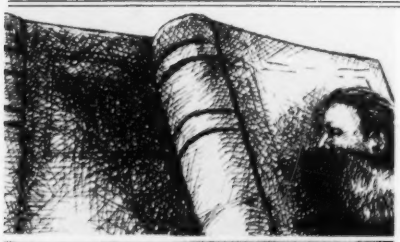
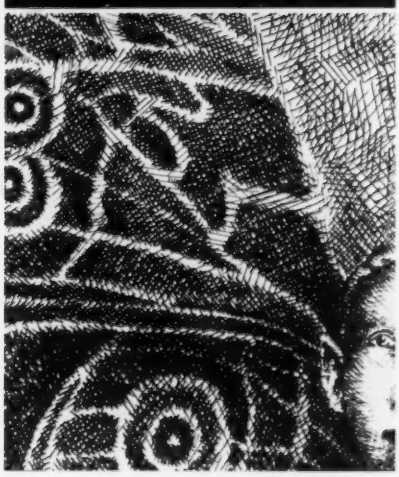
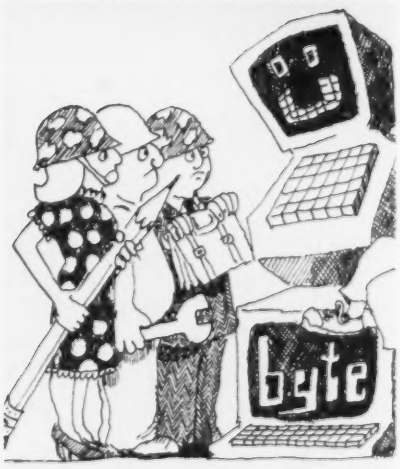


Textbook Adoption: Square Dance or Free-for-All?

- Bernstein
- Farr & Tulley







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Research Evidence of A School Discipline Problem

by Keith Baker

Research indicates that the discipline problem in U.S. public schools is severe enough that it should concern educators, says Mr. Baker. The education community must face the problem squarely and take steps to improve conditions in the schools.

IF WE ARE TO improve discipline in our schools, we must first agree that a problem exists. Considerable research evidence indicates that the discipline problem in U.S. public schools is severe enough that it should concern educators for a number of reasons.

Crime and violence in the schools merit attention because they are socially undesirable. In a statistical sense, murder in the schools is not a big problem, because it does not happen very often. In a moral sense, however, even one murder is unacceptable. Crime and violence of any kind in the schools must always be a concern of educators. Even where the school crime rate is zero, educators must make sure it stays that way.

Schools in which the crime rate is high probably experience high rates of other, less serious discipline problems as well. Therefore, we can probably use the findings of studies of school crime to help us solve other discipline problems. For example, one of the major conclusions to emerge from the most extensive study of

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Illustration by Joe LaMantia

school crime and violence yet conducted is that school safety depends on clearly stated and fairly enforced rules of behavior. That is generally good advice, and its value is not limited to crime prevention.

Finally, educators must be concerned about the lack of discipline in the schools because an educational environment depends on good discipline. A study of inner-city schools in London used data collected over a number of years to show that, when children move from primary school (ages 5 to 11) to secondary school, their behavior and achievement are affected by school characteristics.[1] Students who transferred from behaviorally "bad" elementary schools to "good" secondary schools became good students and vice versa.

The relationship between good behavior and academic performance is shown in Table 1, which displays data from a nationally representative sample of 30,000 high school sophomores. For all types of misbehavior, there was a clear association between poor grades and misbehavior. For example, a student whose grades were mostly D's was nine times as likely as a student whose grades were mostly A's to have had trouble with the law, 24 times less likely to have done homework assignments, and about three times more likely to have cut classes.[2]

Drug abuse and drinking, which must also be numbered among a school's discipline problems, both have a debilitating effect on learning and are generally illegal – at least for young people. A reviewer of the literature on adolescent drug abuse concluded that problem drinking among teenagers is generally related to poor school performance, participation in antisocial activities, and lack of supervision.[3] A study of 367 high school students found that regular consumption of alcohol was associated with lower grades.[4]

A good climate for learning is a climate with good discipline. Fundamental to improving the quality of the schools is the maintenance of a degree of civil behavior sufficient to allow educational improvements to have a chance to succeed.

THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

Eight years ago, the National Institute of Education (NIE) surveyed a nationally representative sample of principals, teachers, and students in secondary schools on the extent of criminal activity in U.S. schools.[5] Because many crimes are not reported to the police, a survey of the population of potential victims of crime provides better statistics on the scope of the problem than do court records or records of police arrests. In fact, the NIE study, commonly referred to as the "Safe School Study," found that only about one in every 58 crimes that occurred in the schools was reported to the police.

According to the Safe School Study, the scope of criminal activity *each month* in America's secondary schools in 1976 was as follows:

- 282,000 students were physically attacked;
- 112,000 students were robbed through force, weapons, or threat;
- 2.4 million students had their personal property stolen;
- 800,000 students stayed home from school because they were afraid to attend;
- 6,000 teachers were robbed;
- 1,000 teachers were assaulted seriously enough to require medical attention;
- 125,000 teachers were threatened with physical harm;
- more than 125,000 teachers encountered at least one situation in which they were afraid to confront misbehaving students;
- one out of two teachers was on the receiving end of an insult or obscene gesture;
- 2,400 fires were set in schools;
- 13,000 thefts of school property occurred;
- 24,000 incidents of vandalism occurred; and
- 42,000 cases of damage to school property occurred.

These figures reflect what happened during a *typical* month in U.S. secondary schools. Over the course of the 1976 school year, there was more than one theft for every secondary school student and teacher in the United States.

Students as victims. As the NIE study showed, students are the most frequent victims of crime in the schools. In addition to the obvious undesirability of being a victim of a crime, the crime rate in schools has an indirect, but perhaps even more serious, effect on students: crime in school teaches students to fear school.

Educators must be concerned about the lack of discipline in the schools because an educational environment depends on good discipline.

A study of 1,200 families in Philadelphia found that 27% of the adolescents feared school grounds, 28% feared school hallways, and 22% feared their classrooms.[6] In a study of the Dade County, Florida, public schools, one-fifth of the secondary school students said that their ability to learn in the classroom was adversely affected by fear of other students.[7]

A detailed analysis of data from the Safe School Study found that in 1976 there were about 3.7 million fearful students in public high schools.[8] Almost 800,000 secondary students (8%) reported staying home from school for at least one day a month because they were afraid to go to school. Students who were afraid received lower grades and were more likely to rate themselves below average in reading ability. These students viewed schools as hostile places offering little promise of academic reward or personal safety. They were more likely than nonfearful students to think that teachers were unable to maintain order or to hold students' interest. Apprehensive students were more likely to dislike their schools, their teach-

Table 1. Grades and Behavior of a Sample Of High School Sophomores

Type of Misbehavior	Grades			
	Mostly A's	Mostly B's	Mostly C's	Mostly D's
Average days absent per semester	2.28	2.99	4.20	7.87
Average days late per semester	2.05	3.12	4.41	6.44
Percentage of sample not doing assigned homework	1.10	2.73	6.27	24.72
Percentage of sample who cut a class during the school year	28.73	43.39	58.15	67.21
Percentage of sample who have been in serious trouble with the law	1.62	2.93	7.37	14.06

*Source: Thomas DiPrete, Chandra Muller, and Nora Shaeffer, *Discipline and Order in American High Schools* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1981).

ers, and their fellow students. The authors of the study pointed out that fear among students reduces their ability to concentrate on schoolwork, creates an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust in school, undermines morale, and teaches that the staff is not in control – that "student disorder is more powerful than the adult call for order."

The Safe School Study found that students from minority groups were generally much more likely to be victims of crime than were white students. Consistent with this finding, in 1982 the Gallup Poll found that members of minority groups were more concerned about school crime than whites were. While 68% of white respondents thought that the discipline problem in the schools was very serious or fairly serious, 81% of nonwhite respondents believed this to be the case.[9]

Students can victimize themselves, too. Alcohol and drug abuse are examples of so-called victimless crimes, in which the victim is the perpetrator. Students' abuse of alcohol and drugs is widespread. As the Third Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health noted:

> A national survey of students in grades 7 through 12 found 74% of the teenagers were drinkers . . . [and] nearly 19% of the students were problem drinkers – 23% of the boys and 15% of the girls.
>
> Approximately two-thirds of high school seniors report ever having used any illicit drug – 60% marijuana, 39% an illicit drug other than marijuana. Six in 10 have used marijuana at least once; one in two use it daily.[10]

Teachers as victims. For many teachers, school has become a hazardous environment and a place to fear. Many teachers face situations in which self-preservation, not teaching, becomes their major concern. For example, a teacher in New Orleans watched while two boys threw a smaller student off a second-floor balcony. The teacher chose not to intervene, lest she, too, be attacked. Other teachers are not so lucky. In Los Angeles,

"I'm home a little early, dear. The kids torched the school."

high school girls who were angry about their grades tossed lighted matches into their teacher's hair, setting it on fire. Subsequently, the teacher suffered an emotional collapse.

But criminal acts are only part of the problem that confronts teachers daily in their classrooms. Generally uncivil behavior by students is one of the major causes of teacher burnout. In one survey, 58% of the teachers polled reported that "individual students who continually misbehave" are the primary cause of job-related stress.[11]

Teacher burnout is a major problem in U.S. schools. More than 90% of 1,282 teachers surveyed in one study had experienced feelings of burnout, and 85% of 7,000 teachers surveyed in another study felt that there were chronic health problems related to teaching. Nearly half (40%) of the teachers responding said that they took prescription drugs to treat job-related illness. In another study of 5,000 Chicago teachers, more than half reported having had some job-related illness.[12]

The stress of teaching led one psychiatrist to compare teaching to war, calling teacher burnout a type of "combat neurosis." In another study, Alfred Bloch and Ruth Bloch reported having treated 575 teachers psychiatrically over a seven-year span.[13] All the treated teachers shared two characteristics: they reported that school was an extremely stressful environment and that violence at school was out of control.

Job-related stress drives teachers out of teaching. *Learning* magazine surveyed more than 1,000 teachers, almost one-quarter of whom said that they were planning to leave teaching because of burnout.[14] The National Education Association (NEA) asked active teachers if they would go into teaching again if they had the chance to begin anew.[15] Table 2 shows that teachers who would not go into teaching again were much more likely to have experienced discipline problems than were teachers who would go into teaching again.

Table 2. Number of Teachers Who Would Not Go into Teaching Again, by Experience with Discipline Problems

Discipline Problem	Number of Teachers Who Would Not Go into Teaching Again for Every 100 Who Would
Had students with six or more chronic behavior problems	146
Misbehavior interfered with teaching to a great extent	183
School's disciplinary policy not clear	132
School's disciplinary policy not strict enough	131
Personal property damaged or stolen	192
Attacked by a student	184

Source: National Education Association, *Teacher Opinion Poll* (Washington, D.C.: NEA, 1980).

Elementary school teachers in the NEA poll reported just as much on-the-job stress as did high school teachers. This finding raises an important point that is often overlooked in the public debate over the lack of discipline in the schools: the problem is not confined to urban high schools. In fact, the NEA teacher poll found that elementary school teachers generally reported *more* interference with their teaching from student misbehavior than did high school teachers. Half of all elementary school teachers in the U.S. reported that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching to a moderate or great extent. Very few (7.7%) elementary teachers reported having no problems with student misbehavior.

Of course, there are obvious differences in the types of misbehavior encountered in the high schools and in the elementary schools. High school teachers are more likely to encounter criminal acts. However, an impromptu game of tag in a second-grade classroom can more seriously disrupt learning for an entire class than a single act of violence on the school grounds.

The NEA poll suggests that student misbehavior interferes more with teaching in the elementary schools than in the high schools. Yet more serious misbehavior – especially criminal acts – occurs in the secondary schools.

Is this a contradiction? Probably not. In many high school classrooms teachers and students have worked out a compromise, a tacit understanding that allows them to coexist in a state of truce. The teacher "agrees" to let troublesome students sit in the back of the room, read comic books, and ignore the lesson. In return, these students tacitly agree not to disrupt the class – at least not too often. The teacher then addresses the lesson only to those students who want to pay attention and ignores the others.

Criminal acts are only part of the problem. Generally uncivil behavior by students is one of the major causes of teacher burnout.

Elementary school teachers do not do this. They are more likely to insist that all students pay attention to the lesson. Consequently, elementary teachers face a more persistent battle with disruptive students.

Taxpayers as victims. Although teachers and students are the most direct victims of classroom disorder, taxpayers are also victimized. The Safe School Study found that each month there were 2,400 acts of arson, 13,000 thefts of school property, 24,000 incidents of vandalism, and 42,000 cases of damage to school property. The National Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) has observed that the annual cost of vandalism – probably in excess of $600 million – exceeds the nation's total spending for textbooks.[16]

TRENDS OVER TIME

As I pointed out above, the most comprehensive data on the extent of school crime come from the Safe School Study and were collected in 1976. Since then, many schools have undertaken programs to reduce school crime and to improve discipline. What has happened during the past eight years?

Deciding whether the problem is getting better or worse is difficult because so few trend data exist. Here I will review two kinds of data: 1) trend data from those few areas for which such data exist and 2) the most recently available data, which, though not nationally representative, provide a picture of the current situation in various parts of the U.S.

Oliver Moles analyzed two sets of data that permit national trends to be established over several years.[17] Using the NEA teacher poll, Moles examined teachers who were victims of assault and property damage between 1972 and 1983 and teachers who were victims of theft between 1978 and 1983. He reported that there were more attacks on teachers during the period from 1979 through 1983 than in the period from 1972 to 1978. Property damage held more or less constant during the same period, except for peaks in 1972 and 1979. Except for a peak in 1979, theft held fairly constant.

Moles used the Department of Justice's crime victimization surveys to study crimes against students and argued that these surveys do not give accurate estimates of the *level* of school crime. However, they can be used to assess trends, since the bias in the data should be the same each year. The crime victimization surveys contain data from 1973 through 1980 on both completed and attempted assaults, thefts, and robberies. Moles concluded that completed assaults rose between 1973 and 1978, dipped in 1979, and then returned to the 1978 level. Attempted assaults were stable over the eight-year period. Theft, the crime most frequently reported by students, declined steadily over the period. The number of reported robberies in several years was too small to permit meaningful analysis.

A comparison of data from 1976 with Moles's data from 1980 shows that assaults on teachers increased by 59% and theft of teachers' property increased by 46%. Completed assaults against students rose by 13%, but attempted assaults declined by 17%. Completed thefts against students dropped by 60%, and attempted thefts fell by 43%.

Another source of information on the changing pattern of school discipline problems is a question from the NEA teacher poll that asked the extent to which teachers find that student misbehavior interferes with their ability to teach. From 1980 through 1983 this question was asked in the same way. The results, displayed in Table 3, suggest some decline in the proportion of teachers complaining of moderate to great interference and a corresponding increase in the proportion of teachers saying that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching to a small extent. The proportion of teachers who reported no behavior problems remained roughly constant at about 10% of all teachers.

From these studies, what can we conclude about the trends in discipline problems since 1976? The picture is confusing. There have been increases in the incidence of some crimes – most notably crimes against teachers – and declines in the incidence of other crimes – most notably thefts against students.

On balance, the data suggest a slight overall improvement. However, it must also be noted that considerable year-to-year variations exist in many of these statistics and that, with the exception of thefts against students from 1973 to 1980, there are no clear-cut trends. On the one hand, it is encouraging to see any indication of improvement. On the other hand, it is discouraging to see that the improvement is so small, especially in light of the extensive efforts of many schools to cope with the problem.

A second way to update the data from the Safe School Study is to examine the most recent data available from school districts and states to see if they are currently experiencing problems. In 1983 the *Detroit Free Press* conducted a survey of teachers across Michigan and found that, during the last school year, 46% of all teachers in the state had been threatened with violence – including 23% who had been threatened by parents of their students.[18] One out of five teachers (19%) had been hit by a student, while 3% had been hit by an intruder and 3% had been hit by a parent. Two out of three teachers said that unmotivated and undisciplined students were a serious problem in their classrooms. One middle school teacher included a can of Mace among her basic teaching supplies.

A study of California schools over a five-month period in 1981 found 100,000 incidents of violence, with an average of 24 teachers and 215 students assaulted every day. Property damage during the five months was $10 million.[19]

The National School Boards Association reported on a 1983 study of crime in seven school districts across the U.S.[20] More than 10% of the students in four of the seven districts admitted breaking windows in school buildings. From 6.6% to

Table 3. Extent to Which Student Misbehavior Interferes with Teaching

Degree of Interference	1979 %	1980 %	1981 %	1982 %	1983 %
Great	16.8	20.9	23.2	17.0	14.5
Moderate	23.1	32.9	28.9	29.8	30.4
Small	33.9	37.7	37.5	42.9	46.0
None	26.2*	8.5	10.4	10.2	9.1
N	1,768	1,731	1,257	1,310	1,467

*In 1979 this response category was "little, if at all."

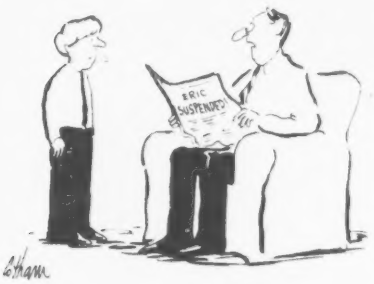
Source: National Education Association, *Teacher Opinion Poll* (Washington, D.C.: NEA, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983).

21.7% of the students in the districts admitted stealing from other students' desks. The proportion of students in each district who reported that they had been victims of such thefts ranged from a low of 42.6% to a high of 72.2%. Between 5.5% and 19.5% of the students reported being victims of physical attacks. A total of 16.4% of the teachers in the seven districts reported that students verbally abused them and swore at them. In one city, 80% of the teachers reported being the victims of verbal abuse.

Boston established a Safe Schools Commission that interviewed 495 high school students from four Boston high schools and found a "disturbingly large amount of victimization"[21] – including the fact that 38% of all Boston high school students had been victims of robbery, assault, or larceny during the previous school year and that incidents occurred at the rate of 63 per 100 students. This is one of the few studies to have differentiated victimization rates (the number of victims during some specified period) from rates of incidence (the number of crimes committed). The difference between the two shows that a large proportion of victims were victimized more than once.

Half of the students reported racial harassment. More than one in four students (28%) said that they were fearful at school on occasion, and 36% said that they avoided some places at school from fear for their personal safety. Twenty-eight percent of Boston high school students admitted carrying weapons to school.

Another study for the Boston Safe Schools Commission surveyed a representative sample of 874 Boston public school teachers and found that half of them had been victimized at least once on school property during the previous year; 11.6% had been victimized five or more times.[22] One out of three Boston teachers (32%) claimed to be afraid or extremely afraid while at school. Theft and vandalism were considered to be very widespread by 19% of the teachers, and 12% said that drug use was very widespread.



"It's not the quality of your school newspaper that I'm so concerned about, Eric!"

For the 1982-83 school year, the Los Angeles Unified School District reported 13,154 violations of the law (down 4% from the year before) and property losses totaling $5,824,784 (down 11% from the year before).[23]

Nationally, the 1983 NEA teacher poll reported that during the preceding school year 28% of all teachers had personal property stolen or damaged at school. During the same period, 4.2% had been attacked by students.

To repeat an important point, crime statistics are the best available data, but they represent only part of the problem. Noncriminal misbehavior probably has a far more serious negative impact on the educational process. In the 1983 NEA teacher poll, very few teachers (less than 10%) reported *no* deleterious effects on their teaching from student misbehavior. By contrast, 14.5% reported that misbehavior interfered with their ability to teach to a great extent, 30.4% reported moderate problems, and 46% reported interference to a small extent.

In Boston, 28% of the teachers thought discipline was a very severe or an extremely severe problem in their schools; this figure includes 17% of elementary teachers and 36% of middle school teachers.[24] Thirty percent of the Boston teachers thought that persistent disruption of classes was very widespread, and 23% said that verbal abuse was very widespread. Elementary and high school teachers classified 8% of their students as severe discipline problems, while middle school teachers reported that 15% of their students were severe discipline problems. More than half of the teachers (53%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that "student troublemakers are kept in line."

From this brief rundown of studies that can be used to update the findings of the Safe School Study, we can conclude that lack of discipline continues to be a serious problem in U.S. schools. Even if there has been some modest improvement since 1976, the current level of discipline problems – especially the level of disruptive behavior in the classroom – is a major problem for public education.

LEARNING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT VICTIM

From an educational perspective, the most important victim of student misbehavior is learning. Students in a drunken or drugged stupor cannot learn. Fighting students cannot learn. Students playing tag or being generally boisterous in the classroom cannot learn. Imagine what happens to the time spent on learning tasks when teachers spend between 30% and 80% of their time addressing discipline problems.[25]

Teachers who function as baby sitters or police officers are not teaching. Students whose teachers do not teach cannot learn.

In most cases, the educational consequences of student misbehavior go beyond the effects on the individual misbehaving student. When a third-grade teacher has to interrupt a reading lesson to stop an impromptu game of tag involving only two students, the education of the entire class suffers. When teacher burnout resulting from the stress of coping with ill-mannered students reduces a teacher's classroom effectiveness or drives a good teacher out of teaching, every one of that teacher's students suffers. When crime and violence create an atmosphere of fear and hostility at school, the efficiency of the education of all students is impaired. Teachers who function as baby sitters or police officers are not teaching. Students whose teachers do not teach cannot learn.

In the study of Boston teachers, teachers were asked their opinion of students. Teachers who had been victims of violence were much more likely than nonvictims to have negative attitudes toward *all* students in their classrooms. Victimized teachers were more likely to think that their students had severe behavior problems, were underachievers, or had minor behavior problems. Victimized teachers thought their students were less interested in school, less likely to have high ability, and more likely to have low ability. The research literature has demonstrated that teachers' expectations of students are related to students' performance. Therefore, victimizing a teacher may indirectly affect the learning of all of that teacher's students.

Children also learn from the misbehavior of others. They learn that authority cannot or will not protect them. They learn to be afraid of school. They learn that adults fear children. They learn that crime does indeed pay, as every day they see other students who rob, steal, talk back, fight, or refuse to do homework – yet are not punished. In such a climate, it

should not be surprising that ethical standards of students suffer. The Safe School Study showed that victims of attacks or robberies in high schools were more inclined toward unethical behavior than were nonvictims (Table 4).

THE SCHOOLS' RESPONSE

The data reviewed above and the continuing public concern over school discipline suggest that the response of the schools to the discipline problem has been inadequate. This conclusion is supported by other data. For example, in the 1982 NEA teacher poll, three out of five teachers who had been physically attacked by students felt that the response of school officials was inadequate. In almost half of the cases, no significant disciplinary action was taken.

In addition to surveying students and teachers to determine the actual incidence of crime in schools, the Safe School Study also asked principals about the existence of crime in the schools. The contrast between the views of students and teachers and the views of principals is sobering. While teachers and students reported being victims of more than three million crimes a month, 75% of the principals claimed that crime was either not a problem or only a small problem in their schools. Principals acknowledged only 157,000 crimes and said that two-thirds of these were never reported to the police.

In Boston, 57% of the teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that their principals were effective disciplinarians, 53% disagreed or strongly disagreed that student troublemakers were kept in line, and 43% felt that the school board was not at all responsive to teachers' concerns about their safety. Among elementary school teachers, 59% thought that suspensions were not used often enough.[26]

When students who commit *criminal* acts go unpunished, the merely unruly or disorderly students know that they have even less to fear. School administrators should pay heed to the National PTA's recommendation: "Students should be punished by the law when they are involved in assaults or violence."[27]

Why are school officials so reluctant to face the discipline problem? First, principals may be motivated to ignore or play down the problem out of fear of appearing incompetent and unable to control their schools. Before the problem can be solved, however, school officials must admit that it exists.

Second, many schools have failed to establish even minimal procedures for dealing with the discipline problem. In many cases, school officials do not know what is happening. Corrective action cannot begin until school officials know the extent and nature of the problem.

Third, many disciplinary actions are ineffective because they are inappropriate. For example, in one school, 45% of all suspensions were for tardiness or skipping classes. It seems obvious that suspending a student who has clearly indicated that he or she does not wish to attend school is more a reward than a punishment. In such cases, a Saturday detention might be more effective than a three-day suspension. Take another example. Many schools still use corporal punishment, though some research indicates that corporal punishment is relatively ineffective.[28] Schools must find more creative solutions to the discipline problem.

Fourth, a number of recent court decisions may have had a chilling effect on the willingness of school officials to enforce disciplinary standards.[29] It is not clear from the literature whether or not school officials have actually been hampered in their enforcement efforts by the actions of the courts or whether some school officials fail to act because they believe the courts have blocked them from acting. In any case, too many of them fail to act.

Fifth, laws and regulations have unintended consequences. To some degree, laws restricting the age at which students can leave school only exacerbate the problem of school discipline. Young people who are kept in school against their will probably create more discipline problems than other students. The U.S. Office for Civil Rights collects information on suspensions and expulsions and analyzes it for patterns of discrimination. Requiring disciplinary actions to be reported may also discourage school officials from taking action against misbehaving minority students (whose victims are also likely to be minority students). As a result, minority students may inadvertently become the victims of violation of their right to a safe school.

The American Association of School Administrators listed the following reasons for administrators and teachers to be reluctant to report crimes in school.[30] The list for administrators includes:

- to avoid bad publicity;
- to avoid blame;
- to avoid litigation;
- because they find some offenses too trivial to report;
- because they prefer to take care of the problems themselves;
- because they suspect that the police and the courts will not work with them; and
- to avoid appearing ineffective.

The list for teachers includes:

- to avoid blame;
- to avoid legal action;
- from fear of retaliation;
- because they are not sure who was to blame; and
- to avoid stigmatizing young people as criminals.

School crime and disorder pose major challenges to America's schools. An effective school system must maintain a level of civil behavior sufficient to allow learning to take place. The available evidence, though not complete, suggests that in far too many of our schools uncivil and even criminal behavior disrupts the learning process.

Although many schools have taken steps to improve their disciplinary climate, one continuing cause of the persistence of discipline problems remains: the failure of many educators and administrators to face the problem squarely, to recognize its importance, and to take steps to improve conditions in the schools.

Table 4. Percentage of Students Inclined Toward Unethical Behavior, by Victimization by School Crime

If You Could Get Away with It, Would You:	Attack		Robbery	
	Victims	Nonvictims	Victims	Nonvictims
Cheat on a test?	23	19	25	19
Spray-paint school walls?	10	4	11	4
Take money from other students?	9	4	9	4
Skip school?	28	24	27	24

Source: National Institute of Education, *Violent Schools, Safe Schools: The Safe School Study Report to the Congress, Vol. 1* (Washington, D.C.: NIE, 1978).

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Restoring Order to the Public Schools

by Gary L. Bauer

Civil behavior in the classroom is a basic prerequisite for learning, insists Mr. Bauer, who strongly supports President Reagan's call for "good, old-fashioned discipline" and condemns the President's critics.

IN SEPTEMBER 1984, the *Kappan* published an article in which two researchers, Irwin Hyman and John D'Alessandro, attacked the motives of the Reagan Administration's school discipline initiative.[1] Hyman and D'Alessandro argued that the Administration's concern over the lack of discipline in U.S. schools was a "harmful overreaction" and an "avowedly right-wing approach to school discipline" perpetuated by "politicians, the media, and special interest groups – all of whom benefit from the myth that U.S. schools are in chaos."

Hyman and D'Alessandro twisted the President's call for "good, old-fashioned discipline" into advocacy of corporal punishment. In one singularly irresponsible passage, they equated the President's concern for orderly behavior in school with such practices as beating students with "doubled-over belts, lacrosse sticks, jai alai sticks, baseball bats, arrows, electrical cords, bamboo rods, rubber hoses, hammers, and wooden drawer dividers." They went on to add, "Some teachers have used cattle prods and similar devices to administer electric shocks to children. Other youngsters have been kicked, choked, or punched – forced to eat cigarettes or to have their faces smeared with hot sauce. One Chicago principal used a pocket knife to drill a hole in a pupil's fingernail."[2] The absurdity of the implication that the President of the United States advocates the use of cattle prods on children speaks for itself.

Student misbehavior is one of the most serious problems facing our schools today. Civil behavior in the classroom is a prerequisite for learning. Even a few disorderly students can disrupt the education of the majority of students who are in school to study and to learn. More than a few disorderly students make education virtually impossible. To prevent this situation, the schools need to do more than merely maintain civil behavior. They must require students to take the responsibility for attending school and learning – and for not interfering with the learning of others.

The President's position on the question of school discipline is simple: students have the right to an education, and we must protect that precious right from the misbehavior of other students. Teachers have the responsibility to educate their students; they also have the right to a safe working environment. Parents have the right to expect the children they send off to school to be educated while they are

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